

Johnny Vinyl’s top albums for 2016

1. Sturgill Simpson: “A Sailor’s Guide to Earth”
Outlaw country artist Sturgill Simpson may sound like Waylon Jennings, but he behaves more like his idol Merle Haggard. He does things his way.

First-time parents respond to the dramatic change children have on their lives differently. Simpson decided to write an album to his son. Since a significant part of making a living as a musician is the necessity of live performance, it means going on tour.

On “A Sailor’s Guide to Earth,” he writes to his first born from the perspective of a sailor who has to go to sea, and may not return. What are the important things he wants his child to know in order to navigate life? He goes to the heart of the matter, leaving nothing out. And dad has made his share of mistakes. But he owns up to all of them in hopes that junior pays attention — subject matter any parent or child could relate to.

This is not your average country album. There is nary a banjo or mandolin to be heard. In their stead are Hammond B-3’s, entire brass sections and gospel choirs, all to the apparent chagrin of some traditionalists. Simpson simply doesn’t care. He had a goal in mind. In the end, father knew best. He has given junior (and the rest of us) an amazing musical guide to life.

It does touch on many genres, often in the course of a single song. That’s part of its charm. It’s also an album that gets better with repeated listening. Most will find themselves singing along with choruses and sailing to the vibe throughout.

2. David Bowie: “Blackstar”
Most who have reviewed Bowie’s “Blackstar” album called it experimental. They obviously have not spent any quality time with most of the albums that preceded it, especially the ’90s releases. “Blackstar” is one of the most accessible Bowie albums, ever. It was meant to be. Bowie had been waging a long battle with cancer. He realized it was one challenge he would not conquer. Early in the recording sessions, producer Tony Visconti realized what was happening and reportedly confronted David saying, “You canny bastard, you’re giving them your eulogy.” To which Bowie supposedly just threw his head back and laughed. When, during the track “Lazarus,” he speaks of being in heaven, it makes it all



JOHNNY VINYL
Comment



Album cover

Sturgill Simpson’s “A Sailor’s Guide to Earth” is Johnny Vinyl’s top choice for the best album of 2016.

seem just a little easier to take. A magical album from a special man. Thanks for everything David!

3. Tragically Hip: “Man Machine Poem”

The U.S. has ignored the revered Canadian band Tragically Hip. Singer and chief songwriter of the band Gord Downie was diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor during recording sessions that would become “Man Machine Poem.” Not only did they complete the album, but a full tour as well. The final show had two giant screens outside the venue in Ontario so the thousands who came without tickets could experience the show standing outside. National networks and online streaming sources made it available free for the entire country. 11.7 million people tuned in. Check out “Man Machine Poem” and get a solid glimpse as to why Canada loves Tragically Hip so much.

4. SWANS: “The Glowing Man”

As Michael Gira folded SWANS in 1997 with a world-wide final tour, none expected the band ever to return. When Gira unexpectedly brought them back in 2010, fans around the world rejoiced. Gira and company have rewarded those same fans with a live album, three studio albums that are each over two hours in length, several mail order-only live albums and DVDs in that time span. The latest three-LP set is “The Glowing Man.” Gira claims that this installment of the band is over and this is its last release. If so, it stands as a great testimony to the entirety of SWANS career. A majestic swan song.

5. SUMAC: “What One Becomes”

Just when it seemed that post-rock had become mired in redundancy along comes SUMAC, a power trio with a massive emphasis on power. Instigating guitarist/songwriter Aaron Turner (Isis, Old Man Gloom, Lotus Eaters) has taken the heavier aspects of his previous bands and forced them through a Black Sabbath filter. The resulting five tracks in 58 minutes astound. The future of post-rock looks a lot better because of this release.

6. Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds: “Skeleton Tree”

Nick Cave’s 15-year-old son Arthur died on July 14, 2015, accidentally. This is his first release since that tragedy. Death has always been a frequent subject of his songwriting. How would he deal with a death so close? Though credited to Bad Seeds, this is a Nick Cave album and the music is pretty sparse. Mostly in the form of poetry set to minimal accompaniment, Mr. Cave exorcises his anguish over the course of eight tracks. This is not an easy listen, but it is a completely human listen. Audio catharsis, indeed.

7. King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard: “Nonagon Infinity”

This Australian collective will use any and every genre at their disposal. They have only been together since 2010 but have released eight full-lengths and two EPs, with their ninth ready to drop in early 2017. On each previous release there have been moments of brilliance amid a lot of chaos. On their eighth, “Nonagon Infinity,” they have finally harnessed their “everything including the kitchen

sink” philosophy into a totally unique and compelling release. Never to be normal, this time out every track morphs into the next. The ending track fades out into the opening of track one; a complete loop. If you play back on repeat, you’ll be unable to distinguish where the album begins or ends. Repeat long enough and the music takes on a truly ambient vibe.

8. The Kills: “Ash & Ice”

Garage rock duo The Kills (Alison Mosshart: vocals; Jaime Hince: instrumentation) have made numerous advancements in filling out the power of two over the course of their first four releases. Their fifth, “Ash & Ice,” continues in that vein. Ms. Mosshart has one of those voices that could sing a grocery list and make it provocative. Mr. Hince has truly learned how to magnify the potency of her vocals with oft-changing accompaniment. Post-apocalyptic lounge music if only Las Vegas survived.

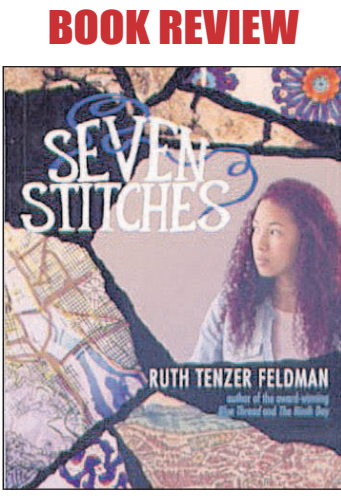
9. case/lang/veirs: “case/lang/veirs”

Certainly the prettiest album of 2016 is the self-titled collaboration of alt/rock and alt/country star Neko Case, country/jazz chanteuse k.d. lang, and indie singer/songwriter Laura Veirs. The fact that they operate in completely different musical spheres is probably what makes this project instantly rewarding. All but four of the 14 tracks were written in one combination of the three or another. They claim that this is a one-time project. The impact of this release coupled with the positive response to their brief tour this past summer will hopefully cause them to reconsider.

10. Opeth: “Sorceress”

Opeth had seemingly lost their identity over the course of their decade of studio releases that Steven Wilson (Porcupine Tree) had a hand in either producing, engineering and/or mixing. Control freak Wilson is nowhere to be found on “Sorceress” and it seems to be exactly what the band needed. They’re still not recognizable as Opeth, but the changes this time have resulted in an instantly engaging prog rock offering. The sub-human growls and black/doom/death metal riffs of yore are exchanged for some of the most forward sounding “progressive” rock available. They may have alienated thousands of fans of their former sounds, but this release opens a plethora of other avenues for them to explore.

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A retired educator, Johnny Vinyl spends his days with Lucifer, a 7-year-old German shepherd, reading and riding the bike. His column, Ride the vibe, focuses on entertainment. Contact him via tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com



Cover photo courtesy Ooligan Press.

Young adult novel imagines Cascadia aftermath

On March 9, 2058, at 4:47 p.m. Greenwich Mean Time, the long-predicted Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake hits the Oregon Coast, registering 8.9 on the Richter scale. A year later, the city of Portland is still living under emergency restrictions and a young woman mourns her missing mother. But Meryem Zarfati, struggling to find her place in the new order, is called away to save the life of a young girl by a mysterious messenger from the past and an antique Jewish prayer shawl passed down through her mother’s family.

“Seven Stitches,” the third young adult fiction novel in the “Blue Thread” series by Ruth Tanzer Feldman, envisions a possible future for Portland after the massive earthquake scientists say is long overdue. Meryem Zarfati is drawn out of her grief in her attempts to save a young girl in 16th century Istanbul from a life of slavery. But the gifts of her ancestors also enable her to make a difference in the life of a girl in her own time, and to discover the truth about her mother’s disappearance.

Tanzer Feldman, a Portland resident, has also written 10 non-fiction books for children and young adults, as well as science and history articles. “Seven Stitches” showcases the author’s formidable research skills and her ability to interweave the past, present and future in a way that informs young people as it entertains. “Seven Stitches,” by Ruth Tanzer Feldman. © 2016, Ooligan Press (ooliganpress.pdx.edu).

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Renee Struthers is the records editor and book reviewer for the East Oregonian. Contact her at rstruthers@eastoregonian.com

WHAT TO DO

New Year’s Eve

UFC 207 & New Year’s Two-Day Celebration

•Friday, Dec. 30; 9 p.m. to Sunday, Jan. 1 at 1 a.m.

•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston.

No cover. Huge special, lots of giveaways and a two-day concert.

New Year’s Eve with Little McKay Creek

•Saturday, Dec. 31; 4 p.m.

•Hamley Slickfork Saloon, 8 S.E. Court Ave., Pendleton

No cover. Dinner, drink and appetizer specials, party favors, prizes and balloon drop. Live music starts at 9 p.m. Join the sprawling two-level party and ring in the new year.

New Year’s Eve@Wildhorse

•Saturday, Dec. 31; 8 p.m. No cover

•Wildhorse Resort & Casino, off I-84 Exit 216, Mission.

www.wildhorseresort.com

WINter Capers New Year’s Eve: Entertainment, party hats, midnight toast Lucky Neighbor Freeplay for \$3,000, Hot Seats every 30 minutes starting at 11 p.m. Wildhorse Sports Bar: Purple Rain theme party with party favors, confetti cannons, giveaways, specialty drinks Harmonious Funk plays from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. Rivers Event Center: Live entertainment with Ants in the Kitchen, dancing, party favors, no-host bar.

Coyote Champagne Ball

•Saturday, Dec. 31; 8 p.m.

•Sub Zero Restaurant & Lounge, 100 W. Highway 730, Irigoin

Free if arrive by 8 p.m. otherwise \$4 cover. Semi-formal/formal attire; no jeans. Includes champagne toast, prizes, raffles, a balloon drop and the Lucky Coyotes will perform.

New Year’s ’80s Bash

•Saturday, Dec. 31; 8 p.m.

•Riverside Sports Bar, 1501 Sixth St., Umatilla

\$10. Includes party favors and champagne and ’80s music with a DJ in the lounge. Also, comedian Susan Jones and live music by Pollywog.

New Year’s Eve Party

•Saturday, Dec. 31; 9 p.m.

•Midway Tavern, 1750 N. First St., Hermiston

No cover. DJ/karaoke, Fireball promos and a champagne toast at midnight.

Festivals

Eagle Cap Extreme Sled Dog Race

•Jan. 18-21

•Joseph, Enterprises, Fergi Ski Area

www.eaglecapextreme.com

Free, except banquet, which is \$20/adults. \$8/ages 5-12, free/4 and under. People can watch the race, meet and visit with mushers during vet checks and

Four-week writing workshop for women impacted by Vietnam

ENTERPRISE — A four-week writing workshop for wives, girlfriends, mothers, sisters and daughters of Vietnam veterans will provide an opportunity to express stories of their experiences beyond the Vietnam conflict.

The Other Warriors: Voices of the Women of Vietnam Veterans is taught by Katherine Stickroth, freelance writer and widow of a Vietnam veteran. The class will provide a private, confidential and supportive space for members to find the voice of their stories through the written word. No previous writing experience is required.

The event is each Saturday in January from 9-11 a.m. at Fishtrap, 400 E. Grant St., Enterprise. Registration is \$10 per session.

For more information or to reserve a spot, call 541-426-3623.

a meet-and-greet and buy merchandise. The banquet, which is a fundraiser, includes an auction and live entertainment.

Robert Burns Supper

•Saturday, Jan. 28; 2 p.m.

•Elks Lodge

\$30/couple, \$17/single. In its 20th year, the event celebrated the poet Robert Burns with food, fun and a toast to the Scottish national poet.

Eastern Oregon Bridal Show

•Sunday, Feb. 19; TBA

•Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395

www.eobridalshow.com

One-stop planning event for the wedding of your dreams.

Art, Museums & Authors

Student Art + Telera McCullough & Amy Fink

•Saturdays/Sundays; noon-5 p.m.

•Arts Portal Gallery, 508 N. Main St., Milton-Freewater

Free. Exhibit features artwork from Central Middle School and Mac-Hi students, as well as the felted wool work of McCullough and Fink.

Art of the Gift

•Tuesday-Fridays, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturdays, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

•Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St.

www.pendletonarts.org

Free. Unique holiday gift shopping of more than 35 artists. Also, in the gallery are gorgeous antique American stained glass windows from the collection of Frank Duff. Handcrafted furniture by Bruce Gianotti and Jeff Blackwood also on display and available for sale. Runs through Dec. 31.

Gallery show features faculty art

LA GRANDE — The Nightingale Gallery rings in the new year with an exhibition of works by Eastern Oregon University’s accomplished and internationally recognized visual arts faculty.

Visitors will gain an in-depth look at the recent studio practices of exhibiting professors Jaime Gustavson, Nathan Prouty, Michael Sell, Jessie Street and Kerri Rosenstein.

The opening reception is Friday, Jan. 13 from 6-8 p.m. in the gallery at Loso Hall on the La Grande campus. The public can view the exhibit free of charge Monday through Fridays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

“These dedicated artists and educators have worked together to create a dynamic exhibition that serves as an example of the excellence and cooperation that defines the university’s art program,” said Cory Peeke, Nightingale Gallery director and professor of art.

For more information, contact Peeke at 541-962-3584, cpeeke@eou.edu or visit www.eou.edu/art.

recent studio practices of exhibiting professors Jaime Gustavson, Nathan Prouty, Michael Sell, Jessie Street and Kerri Rosenstein. Runs through Feb. 10.

Music

Harmonious Funk

•Saturday, Dec. 31; 8 p.m. No cover

•Wildhorse Sports Bar, Wildhorse Resort & Casino, off I-84 Exit 216, Mission

TBA

•Friday, Jan. 6; Saturday, Jan. 7; 8 p.m. No cover

•Wildhorse Sports Bar, Wildhorse Resort & Casino, off I-84 Exit 216, Mission

Cabin Fever

•Saturday, Jan. 14 and 21; 5:30 p.m., doors open for Dutch oven dinner; 6:30 p.m., show only

•Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395

\$38/dinner show, \$15/show only. John Wambeck & Friends present a musical variety show. Tickets available at Cottage Flowers, 1725 N. First St., Hermiston.

Night life

Karaoke w/DJ David

•Fridays and Saturdays; 8 p.m.

•Riverside Sports Bar, 1501 Sixth St., Umatilla

Whiskey Wednesday Game Night

•Wednesdays; 3-7 p.m.

•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston

No cover. Xbox 360, Nintendo Wii, PlayStation 3 and Nintendo 64.

Digital Karaoke

•Thursdays and Fridays, 8 p.m.

•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston

Mac’s Trivia Night

•Thursdays, 8 p.m. No cover

•Mac’s Bar & Grill, 1400 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton

21 and older. Eat. Drink. Think. Teams of 2-8 compete in trivia contest with other teams. Live host and prizes.

Open Mic

•First/Third Friday each month, 8 p.m.-midnight

•The Packard Tavern, 118 S.E. Court Ave., Pendleton

www.facebook.com/groups/pendletonopenmic

Limmi’s Late Night Martini Lounge

•Fridays; 9 p.m.-midnight

•Virgil’s at Cimmiyotti’s, 137 S. Main St., Pendleton

No cover. Features martinis, mixology and music.

Theater, Stage & Film

New Year’s Eve Dinner & Story Slam

•Saturday, Dec. 31; 6:30-9 p.m.

•Historic Balch Hotel, 40 S. Heimrich St., Dufur

www.balchhotel.com

\$65. Do you have a story in you waiting to be told? Head to the Balch and share on this year’s theme, “Never Thought It Would Turn Out This Way.” For reservations and time, call 541-467-2277.

Dancing with the Hermiston Stars

•Saturday, Jan. 14; 7 p.m.

•Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St.

www.desertartscouncil.com

\$20/adults, \$10/students (additional \$5 at the door). Presented by Desert Arts Council, it features a new lineup of community stars who hit the dance floor with members of the Utah Ballroom Dance Company.

Melonville Comedy Festival

•Saturday, Jan. 28; 8 p.m.

•Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395

www.melonvillecomedyfestival.com

\$35. Features a trio of funny men, Dwight Slade, Gabriel Rutledge and Chase Mayers. No-host bar and food available. Tickets available at event website or the Hermiston chamber.

Hot tickets

•Cabin Fever: Jan. 14 & Jan. 21, Hermiston Conference Center. \$38/Dutch oven dinner show, \$15/show only via Cottage Flowers, 1725 N. First St., Hermiston

•Roots & Boots Concert: Feb. 10 Wildhorse Resort & Casino. \$49.99-\$125 via www.wildhorseresort.com

Want to get your event listed in our calendar? Send information to community@eastoregonian.com, or c/o Tammy Malgesini, 333 E. Main Street, Hermiston, OR, 97838.